



National Park Service
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Biosphere Reserve
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Going to the Sun Road Dedicated 70 Years Ago

Called "A Gift of Priceless Worth" at 1933 Dedication

WEST GLACIER, MONT. - It has been called an engineering marvel and a gift of priceless worth to the people of this country. Tuesday, July 15 marks the 70th anniversary of the dedication of the Going to the Sun Road in Glacier National Park.

"There is no highway which will give the sightseer, the lover of grandeur of the Creator's handiwork, more thrills, more genuine satisfaction deep in his being, than will a trip over this road," Montana Governor Frank H. Cooney said at the road's dedication on July 15, 1933. Seven decades later, the road continues to awe and inspire the estimated 1.5 million visitors who travel across it annually.

"The Sun Road is both a national and international treasure which we are dedicated to preserve for future generations," Glacier National Park Superintendent Mick Holm said.

Discussions for building a road through Glacier National Park's backcountry began almost as soon as Major William R. Logan took on the job as the park's first superintendent in 1911. The toughest question from the start was where to build the Transmountain Highway, as it was first known. Early surveyors proposed a road through Swiftcurrent Pass, Gunsight Pass or Logan Pass.

Stephen Mather, who became the first Director of the National Park Service in 1916, believed only one east-west road should cut through the park. The year before, Mather and his assistant, Horace Albright rode horseback through the area, getting a firsthand look at possible routes. The one which stood out among all the rest led from Belton (West Glacier), along Lake McDonald, over Logan Pass and down into the St. Mary Valley.

The proposed Logan Pass route was surveyed in 1918 and construction began in 1921. Initial funding for the road was small and sporadic until, in 1924, Congress appropriated \$1,000,000. Then, in a historic agreement, the National Park Service joined with the

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Bureau of Public Roads (now known as the Federal Highway Administration) to build the highway.

Construction of the western section of the road reached Logan Pass astride the Continental Divide on October 20, 1928. That portion was opened to traffic eight months later. Completing the eastern section to link up with the west would take until the fall of 1932.

In all, it took three decades and more than \$2,000,000 to plan and construct what then-Superintendent Eivind Scoyen called “the most beautiful piece of mountain highway in the world.”

On a sunny July 15, 1933, more than 4,000 people gathered at Logan Pass for the official dedication of the Sun Road. Superintendent Scoyen presided over the festivities, reading congratulatory messages from Secretary of Interior Harold Ickes and National Park Service Director Horace Albright. A boys’ choir made up of recruits from the Civilian Conservation Corps sang and delegates from the Blackfeet, Flathead and Kootenai tribes took part in the ceremonial offering of a peace pipe.

Speaking to the thousands gathered on the alpine tundra, O.S. Warden, the Chairman of the Montana State Highway Commission, praised the late Stephen Mather and his vision for the road. “If there is no vision of tomorrow, little will be accomplished today,” Warden said. “History teaches this much, the rule applies to what we build as well as to what we preserve and keep.”

The Sun Road has been repeatedly recognized for its significance. It is one of only two roads in the United States designated as a National Historic Landmark (1997). In addition, it is listed on the National Register of Historic Places (1983) and has been named a National Historic Civil Engineering Landmark (1985) by the American Society of Civil Engineers.

At the 1933 dedication, Governor Cooney described the road as “a new glory for the enchantment of those who come by car.” And he added, “It is my earnest hope that in the years to come, millions of our citizens and many from abroad may pass this way and go on to their destination the better for having come and rich in memories of a trip that cannot be excelled.”

“For the past 70 years, Governor Cooney’s hope has been a reality,” Holm said. “We plan to insure another 70 years of visitor enjoyment.”

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Editor’s Note: Digital Images of the dedication ceremony and the first “Jammer” going across the Logan Pass are available by contacting the Public Affairs Office.